

Congresswoman Matsui Reiterates Call for Committee to Review Risk-Based Homeland Security Grant

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June 2, 2006

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Sacramento, CA - Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (CA-5), in her continued effort to understand the Department of Homeland Security's revised eligibility guidelines for the Urban Area Security Initiative grant program, sent a follow-up letter to the House Committee on Homeland Security reiterating her request for a hearing on the program assessment process and the scope of its new risk standards. Even though Sacramento saw a slight increase in grant funding this year, the revised guidelines put the region's eligibility for future funding in question.

"We all agree that a risk-based grant program is an effective use of our limited resources. However, policy is only as good as the information that goes into it. The Department of Homeland Security has already acknowledged that it failed to take into account the catastrophic downstream impact to my district if there were an attack on Folsom Dam, which only raises the question of what other targets have they overlooked?" The text of the letter follows.

The Honorable Peter King

Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Bennie Thompson

Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Dave Reichert

Chairman, Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Science and Technology

The Honorable Bill Pascrell

Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Science and Technology

Dear Chairman and Ranking Members:

With the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) announcement this week of the FY 2006 Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant funding, even more questions have arisen over the Department's new risk-based grant program. In light of this latest development in our homeland security effort, I would like to follow-up on my January 19, 2006 request that the Committee on Homeland Security hold hearings on the new UASI assessment process and the scope of its new risk standards. This information will also prove useful for reauthorization of the Department of Homeland Security's grant programs.

As you are aware, this was the first year that DHS used risk-based guidelines to determine both eligibility and grant funding. Therefore, my district of Sacramento, and 10 other cities, were notified that their UASI funding may be terminated in future years if they do not meet DHS's new risk assessment standards. Even though Sacramento saw a slight increase in grant funding this year, the revised guidelines put our eligibility for future funding in question. And now, additional concerns have arisen over the final review of various urban areas' grant proposals.

Since learning of DHS's new risk based guidelines in January, I have been working to understand the full scope of what was included in DHS's assessment. However, DHS has yet to provide a complete and total explanation for the decisions they made. Based on the minimal information I have received from DHS, the new guidelines seem to omit critical elements relating to our security responsibilities. DHS has already acknowledged that it failed to take into account the catastrophic downstream impact to my district if there were an attack on Folsom Dam. This only heightens my concern that other critical infrastructure and threats may also have been overlooked.

While I agree that homeland security funds should be distributed based on risk, I am deeply concerned that the Department's revised assessment process and implementation of the risk-based program have not been fully developed. National security is a top priority for this country, and the UASI program is one resource we have to ensure we are as prepared as possible for a natural disaster or terrorist attack.

It is important that DHS address these concerns to ensure that the UASI grant program accomplishes its goals. This means there must be increased transparency and understanding of the process before the next UASI review is conducted. I therefore respectfully urge the Committee to hold hearings regarding the degree to which DHS's process for determining eligibility for UASI grants accurately takes into account the risks faced by urban areas. I hope that the Chairmen and Ranking Members will work together to hold hearings in the near future.

Sincerely,

DORIS O. MATSUI

Member of Congress

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